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MARCH 1921

A HOUSE

The House. I am the House!
I resemble

The drawing of a child
That draws "just a house." Two windows and two doors,
Two chimney pots;
Only two floors.
Three windows on the upper one; a fourth
Looks towards the north.
I am very simple and mild;
I am very gentle and sad and old.
I have stood too long.

The Tree. I am the great Tree over above this House!
I resemble

The drawing of a child. Drawing "just a tree"
The child draws Me!
Heavy leaves, old branches, old knots:

POETRY: *A Magazine of Verse*

I am more old than the house is old.
I have known nights so cold
I used to tremble;
For the sap was frozen in my branches,
And the mouse,
That stored her nuts in my knot-holes, died. I am strong
Now . . . Let a storm come wild
Over the Sussex Wold,
I no longer fear it.
I have stood too long!

The Nightingale. I am the Nightingale. The summer
through I sit
In the great tree, watching the house, and throw jewels
over it!
There is no one watching but I; no other soul to waken
Echoes in this valley night!

The Unborn Son of the House. You are mistaken!
I am the Son of the House!—
That shall have silver limbs, and clean straight haunches,
Lean hips, clean lips and a tongue of gold;
That shall inherit
A golden voice, and waken
A whole world's wonder!

The Nightingale. Young blood! You are right,
So you and I only
Listen and watch and waken
Under
The stars of the night.

Ford Madox Hueffer

The Dog of the House. You are mistaken!

This house stands lonely.

Let but a sound sound in the seven acres that surround

Their sleeping house,

And I, seeming to sleep, shall awaken.

Let but a mouse

Creep in the bracken,

I seeming to drowse, I shall hearken.

Let but a shadow darken

Their threshold; let but a finger

Lie long or linger,

Holding their latch:

I am their Dog. And I watch!

I am just Dog. And being His hound

I lie

All night with my head on my paws,

Watchful and whist!

The Nightingale. So you and I and their Son and I

Watch alone, under the stars of the sky.

The Cat of the House. I am the Cat. And you lie!

I am the Atheist!

All laws

I coldly despise.

I have yellow eyes;

I am the Cat on the Mat the child draws

When it first has a pencil to use.

The Milch-goat. I am the Goat. I give milk!

The Cat of the House. I muse

POETRY: *A Magazine of Verse*

Over the hearth with my 'minishing eyes
Until after
The last coal dies.
Every tunnel of the mouse,
Every channel of the cricket,
I have smelt.
I have felt
The secret shifting of the mouldered rafter,
And heard
Every bird in the thicket.
I see
You,
Nightingale up in your tree!
The Nightingale. The night takes a turn towards cold-
ness; the stars
Waver and shake.
Truly more wake,
More thoughts are afloat;
More folk are afoot than I knew!
The Milch-goat. I, even I, am the Goat!
Cat of the House. Enough of your stuff of dust and of
mud!
I, born of a race of strange things,
Of deserts, great temples, great kings,
In the hot sands where the nightingale never sings!
Old he-gods of ingle and hearth,
Young she-gods of fur and of silk—
Not the mud of the earth—

Ford Madox Hueffer

Are the things that I dream of!
The Milch-goat. Tibby-Tab, more than you deem of
I dream of when chewing the cud
For my milk:
Who was born
Of a Nan with one horn and a liking for gin
In the backyard of an inn.
A child of Original Sin,
With a fleece of spun-silk
And two horns in the bud—
I, made in the image of Pan,
With my corrugate, vicious-cocked horn,
Now make milk for a child yet unborn.
That's a come-down!
And you with your mouse-colored ruff,
Discoursing your stuff-of-a-dream,
Sell your birthright for cream,
And bolt from a cuff or a frown.
That's a come-down!
So let be! That's enough!
The House. The top star of the Plough now mounts
Up to his highest place.
The dace
Hang silent in the pool.
The night is cool
Before the dawn. Behind the blind
Dies down the one thin candle.
Our harried man,

POETRY: *A Magazine of Verse*

My lease-of-a-life-long Master,
Studies against disaster;
Gropes for some handle
Against too heavy Fate; pores over his accounts,
Studying into the morn
For the sake of his child unborn.

The Unborn Son of the House. The vibrant notes of the
spheres,

Thin, sifting sounds of the dew,
I hear. The mist on the meres
Rising I hear . . . So here's
To a lad shall be lusty and bold,
With a voice and a heart ringing true!
To a house of a livelier hue!

The House. That is true!

I have stood here too long and grown old.

Himself. What is the matter with the wicks?

What on earth's the matter with the wax?

The candle wastes in the draught;

The blind's worn thin!

. . . Thirty-four and four, ten . . .

And ten . . . are forty-nine!

And twenty pun twelve and six was all

I made by the clover.

It's a month since I laughed:

I have given up wine.

And then . . .

The Income Tax!

Ford Madox Hueffer

The Dog of the House. The mare's got out of the stable!

The Cat of the House. She's able, over and over,

To push up the stable latch . . .

Over and over again. You would say she's a witch,

With a spite on our Man!

The Milch-goat. Heu! Did you see how she ran!

She's after the clover; she's over the ditch,

Doing more harm than a dozen of goats

When there's no one to watch.

Yet she is the sober old mare with her skin full of oats,

Whereas we get dry bracken and heather;

Snatching now and then a scrap of old leather,

Or half an old tin,

As the price of original sin!

Himself. I shall live to sell

The clock from the hall;

I shall have to pawn my old Dad's watch,

Or fell

The last old oak; or sell half the stock . . .

Or all!

Or the oak chest out of the hall.

One or the other—or all.

God, it is hell to be poor

For ever and ever, keeping the Wolf from the door!

The Cat of the House. Wouldn't you say

That Something, heavy and furry and grey,

Was sniffing round the door?

Wouldn't you say

POETRY: *A Magazine of Verse*

Skinny fingers, stretching from the thicket,
Felt for the latch of the wicket?
Himself. You would almost say
These blows were repercussions
Of an avenging Fate!
But how have we earned them . . .
The sparks that fell on the cornricks and burned them
Still in the ear;
And all the set-backs of the year—
Frost, drought and demurrage,
The tiles blown half off the roof?
What is it, what is it all for?
Chastisement of pride? I swear we have no pride!
We ride
Behind an old mare with a flea-bitten hide!
Or over-much love for a year-old bride?
But it's your duty to love your bride! . . . But still,
All the sows that died,
And the cows all going off milk;
The cream coming out under proof;
The hens giving over laying;
The bullocks straying,
Getting pounded over the hill!
It used to be something—cold feet going over
The front of a trench after Stand-to at four!
But these other things—God, how they make you blench!
Aye, these are the pip-squeaks that call for
Four-in-the-morning courage . . .

Ford Madox Hueffer

May you never know, my wench,
That's asleep up the stair!
Herself [*In her sleep*]. I'll have a kitchen all white tiles;
And a dairy, all marble the shelves and the floor;
And a larder, cream-white and full of air.
I'll have whitewood kegs for the flour,
And blackwood kegs for the rice and barley,
And silvery jugs for the milk and cream . . .
O glorious Me!
And hour by hour by hour by hour,
On piles of cushions from hearth to door,
I'll sit sewing my silken seams,
I'll sit dreaming my silver dreams;
With a little, mettlesome, brown-legged Charley,
To leave his ploys and come to my knee,
And question how God can be Three-in-One
And One-in-Three.
And all the day and all the day
Nothing but hoys for my dearest one;
And no care at all but to kiss and twine;
And nought to contrive for but ploys and play
For my son, my son, my son, my son!
Only at nine,
With the dinner finished, the men at their wine;
And the girls in the parlor at forfeits for toffee,
I'll make such after-dinner coffee . . .
But it's all like a dream!
Himself. If Dixon could pay! . . . But he never will.

POETRY: *A Magazine of Verse*

He promised to do it yesterday . . . But poor old Dicky's
been through the mill.

And it's late—it's too late to sit railing at Fate!

He'd pay if he could; but he's got *his* fix on . . .

Yet . . . If he *could* pay—

God!—It would carry us over the day

Of Herself!

The Clock in the Room. I am the Clock on the Shelf!

Is . . . Was . . . Is . . . Was!

Too late . . . Because . . . Too late . . . Because . . .

One! . . . Two! . . . Three! . . . Four!

Himself. Just over The Day and a week or two more!

And we'd maybe get through.

Not with a hell of a lot

Of margin to spare . . . But just through!

The Clock in the Hall. One! . . . Two! . . . One! . . .

Two!

As . . . your . . . hours . . . pass

I re . . . cord them

Though you . . . waste them

Or have . . . stored them

ALL . . .

One!

Two!

Three!

Four!

Begun!

Half through!

Ford Madox Hueffer

Let be!

No more at all!

I am the Great Clock in the Hall!

Himself. It is four by the clock:

The creak of the stair

Might waken *Herself*;

It would give her a shock

If I went up the stair.

I will doze in the chair.

The House. Sad! Sad!

Poor lad!

I am getting to talk like the clock!

Year after year! Shock after shock!

Sunlight and starlight; moonlight and shadows!

I've seen him sit on his three-legged stool,

And heard him whimper, going to school.

But he's paid all the debts that a proper lad owes

Stoutly enough . . . You might call me a clock

With a face of old brick-work instead of the brass

Of a dial.

For I mark the generations as they pass:

Generation on generation,

Passing like shadows over the dial

To triumph or trial;

Over the grass, round the paths till they lie all

Silent under the grass.

Himself. And it isn't as if we courted the slap-up
people . . .

POETRY: *A Magazine of Verse*

The House. Now does he remember the night when he
came from the station

In Flood-year December?

Himself. Or kicked our slippers over the steeple,

Or leaving the whites ate only the yolk.

We're such simple folk!

With an old house . . . Just any old house!

Only she's clean: you won't find a flea or a louse!

We've a few old cows—

Just any old cows!—

No champion short-horns with fabulous yields . . .

Two or three good fields;

And the old mare, going blinder and blinder . . .

And too much Care to ride behind her!

The House. I'd like him to remember . . .

There were floods out far and wide;

And that was my last night of pride,

With all my windows blazing across the tide . . .

I wish he would remember . . .

Himself. Just to get through; keeping a stiff upper lip!

Just . . . through! . . . With my lamb unshorn;

So that she mayn't like me be torn by care!

It's not

Such a hell of a lot!

Just till the child is born . . .

You'd think: God, you'd think

They could let us little people . . . creep

Past in the shadows . . .

Ford Madox Hueffer

But the sea's . . . too . . . deep!

Not to sink . . . Not . . . sink!

Just to get through . . .

Christ, I can't keep . . . It's too . . . deep . . .

The Cat of the House. He has fallen asleep. Up onto his
knee!

I shall sleep in the pink.

The House. You see!

His mind turns to me

As soon as he sleeps. For he called me a ship

On my last day of pride,

And he dreams of me now as a ship

As I looked in the days of my pride.

Then, he was driving his guests from the station,

And the floods were wide

All over the countryside . . .

All my windows lit up and wide,

And blazing like torches down a tide,

Over the waters . . .

The Mare [From the cloverfield]. That wouldn't be me!

When I was young I lived in Dover,

In Kent, by the sea. So he didn't drive me.

When I was young I went much faster

Over the sticks as slick as a hare,

With a gunner officer for a master.

And I took officers out to lunch

With their doxies to Folkestone. It wouldn't be me!

The Milch-goat. Munch; munch . . . Munch; munch!

POETRY: *A Magazine of Verse*

In the Master's clover . . . But poor old Me!
The Unborn Son of the House. Malodorous Image-of-Sin-
with-a-Beard,
It is time I was heard.
The House. That Christmas night . . .
Son of the House. It would have to be Christmas
With floods so they missed Mass . . .
The House. Your Dad's never missed Mass
At Christmas! . . .
So all my windows, blazing with light
Called out Welcome across the night.
And the Master's voice came over to me:
"The poor old shanty looks just like a ship,
Lit up and sailing across the sea!"
That was my lad . . .
And another, just as young and as glad,
As they used to be, all, before the war,
Said: "And all of her lamps have all their wicks on!"
That would be Dickson . . .
Son of the House. My mother, when her pains have loosed
her
And I am grown to man's estate,
Shall go in gold and filagree;
And I'll be king and have a king's glory . . .
The Rooster. Kickeriko! Kickerikee!
I am the Rooster!
Son of the House. The Dad, with no hair on his pate,
Reading my story . . .

Ford Madox Hueffer

The Rooster. I am the Bird of the Dawn, calling the world
to arouse.

I, even I, am the cock of the house!

The Skylark. Time I was up in the sky!

It is time for the dew to dry.

I am the Bird of the Dawn!

The Nightingale. Time I was down on my nest.

The moon has gone down in the west:

Day-folk, goodbye!

The House-dog. Here's our young maid! What a yawn!

The Milch-goat. The houseboy is crossing the lawn

Under the fir.

Will he give me a Swede?

That's the thing I most need!

The House. What a stir! What a stir!

Did you ever?

All of a sudden it's day

With its tumult and fever!

I must have nodded away!

The Drake. I am the Drake! I'm the Drake.

We too have been all night awake;

But making no fuss, not one of the seven of us.

For our heads were far under our legs

Drinking the dregs of the lake.

Therefore my ladies lay eggs,

Ducksegg green!

The Maid. Where have you hid

The copper-lid?

POETRY: *A Magazine of Verse*

Where on earth have you been?

Where on earth is it hidden?

Houseboy. I didn't!

Maid. You did!

Houseboy. I didn't . . . I never . . .

Maid. I see you . . .

Houseboy. *You never!*

Maid. How on earth can I ever

Cook the pigs' food if I can't find the lid

Of the copper?

Houseboy. You whopper! I never

Touched the old lid of your copper!

Maid. The lid's lying out in the midden.

Himself must have took it!

Houseboy. So there then! Give over!

.

Maid. Did you ever! What next!

Our Master's asleep in his chair!

I'll wager you never a leg he's stirred

Since four of the clock, with the cat on his knee!

Postman. This letter's registered!

Maid [*To Himself*]. Ned Postman wants a receipt in
ink . . .

Himself [*Opening letter*]. To sink . . . No, not to sink!

Maid. It's a registered letter

The postman wants a receipt in ink for.

Herself [*Calling from upper window*]. Charley!

The mare's in the clover,

Making for the barley.
She's knocking down the sticks . . .

Himself. It's over—
We're over this terrible fix
For a quarter or so!

Herself. And we were in such a terrible fix!—
And you never let me know!

Himself. Not quite enough to take to drink for . . .
[*To Houseboy.*] Fetch the mare from the barley,
You'd better . . .

Herself. Oh, Charley!

Himself. I said: Not quite enough to take to drink for!
It was like being master of a ship,
Watching a grey torpedo slip
Through waves all green.
It would have been . . .
And all one's folk aboard . . .

Herself. Yourself! Yourself! You'll surely now afford
Yourself a new coat . . .
And a proper chain and collar for the goat!

Himself. Good Lord!
Yourself! Yourself! You may go to town
And see a show: there are five or six on,
And you can have the little new gown
You said you'd fix on . . .

Herself. But, O Yourself, we can't afford it!

Himself. You've not had a jaunt since the honeymoon . . .
Thirteen months and a day. And very soon . . .

POETRY: *A Magazine of Verse*

The Unborn Son of the House. I shall so pronk it and
king it and lord it—

Over the sunshine and under the moon . . .

Himself. If Fate be kind and do not frown,
And do not smite us knee and hip,
This poor old patched-up thing of a ship
May take us yet over fields all green,
And you be a little dimity queen . . .

Son of the House. As the years roll on and the days go by,
I shall grow and grow in majesty . . .

Herself. You always say I've no majesty!—
Not even enough for a cobbler's queen!

The House. By and by
They'll be talking of copper roofs for the sty!

The Pigs. We were wondering when you would come to
the Pigs!

Yet they say it's we that pay the rent!

Himself. Great golden ships in ancient rigs
Went sailing under the firmament,
And still sail under the sky and away—
Tall ships and small . . .
And great ships sink and no soul to say.
But, God being good, in the last resort
I will bring our cockle-shell into port
In a land-locked bay,
And no more go sailing at all!

Herself. Kind God! We are safe for a year and a day!
And he is so skilful, my lord and my master,

Ford Madox Hueffer

So skilled to keep us all from disaster;
Such a clever, kindly, Working One!
That I'll yet have my dairy with slabs of marble,
A sweet-briar thicket where sweet birds warble,
And an ordered life in a household whereof he
Most shall praise the nine-o'clock coffee;
And a little, mettlesome, brown-kneed One
To lie on my heart when the long day's done . . .
Rooster. Pullets, go in; run out of the sun!
He's climbing high and the hayseed's dun.
I am the Rooster with marvelous legs!
Pullets, run nestwards and lay your eggs!
Herself. For my son; my son; my son; my son!

EPILOGUE

The House Itself. I am their House! I resemble
The drawing of a child.
Drawing, "just a house," a child draws one like me,
With a styte beside it maybe, or a willow-tree,
Or aspens that tremble.
That's as may be . . .

But all the other houses of all nations
Grand or simple, in country or town,
All, all the houses standing beneath the sky
Shall have very much the same fate as I!
They shall see the pressing of generations
On the heels of generations;

POETRY: *A Magazine of Verse*

Shall bear with folly; shall house melancholy;
At seasons dark and holy shall be hung with holly;
On given days they shall have the blinds drawn down,
And so pass into the hands—
Houses and lands into the hands
Of new generations.
These shall remain
For a short space or a long,
Masterful, cautious or strong;
Confident or overbold.
But at last all strong hands falter;
Frosts come; great winds and drought;
The tiles blow loose; the steps wear out;
The rain
Percolates down by the rafter.
Their youths wear out;
Until, maybe, they become very gentle and mild.
For certain they shall become very gentle and old,
Having stood too long.
And so, all over again,
The circle comes round:
Over and over again.
And . . .
If You rise on this earth a thousand years after
I have fallen to the ground,
Your fate shall be the same:
Only the name
Shall alter!

Ford Madox Hueffer